

VZCZCXRO1265
OO RUEHWEB
DE RUEHLM #1066 3280557
ZNR UUUUU ZZH
O 240557Z NOV 09 ZDK
FM AMEMBASSY COLOMBO
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 0828
INFO RUCNMEM/EU MEMBER STATES COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
RUEHKA/AMEMBASSY DHAKA PRIORITY 2090
RUEHIL/AMEMBASSY ISLAMABAD PRIORITY 9118
RUEHKT/AMEMBASSY KATHMANDU PRIORITY 7362
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON PRIORITY 5257
RUEHNE/AMEMBASSY NEW DELHI PRIORITY 3515
RUEHNY/AMEMBASSY OSLO PRIORITY 5195
RUEHOT/AMEMBASSY OTTAWA PRIORITY 0063
RUEHSM/AMEMBASSY STOCKHOLM PRIORITY 0730
RUEHKO/AMEMBASSY TOKYO PRIORITY 4312
RUEHCG/AMCONSUL CHENNAI PRIORITY 9679
RUEHBI/AMCONSUL MUMBAI PRIORITY 6973
RUEHON/AMCONSUL TORONTO PRIORITY 0051
RHEFDIA/DIA WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEHGV/USMISSION GENEVA PRIORITY 3855
RHHMUNA/HQ USPACOM HONOLULU HI PRIORITY
RUEHBS/USEU BRUSSELS PRIORITY
RHEHAAA/NATIONAL SECURITY COUNCIL WASHINGTON DC PRIORITY
RUEKJCS/SECDEF WASHDC PRIORITY

UNCLAS COLOMBO 001066

SENSITIVE
SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SCA/INSB

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PREF](#) [PHUM](#) [PTER](#) [EAID](#) [MOPS](#) [CE](#)
SUBJECT: BATTLE OF THE TITANS BEGINS

¶1. (U) Late on November 23, President Mahinda Rajapaksa began the process to hold an early presidential election and instructed the Elections Commission to begin preparations for the election. Rajapaksa issued the instructions at a meeting with leaders of political parties constituting the ruling UPFA coalition and his own SLFP party cadre. Rajapaksa told his party cadre that his decision to hold an election early was because he had accomplished in four years the work that had been planned for a full presidential term. (NOTE: Rajapaksa was elected president in November 2005 for a six-year term. The constitution allows the president to call an early election after he has served four years. END NOTE.)

¶2. (SBU) Post expects the election to be held in late January. Embassy contacts note that the election date could be either 23 or 26 January. Sri Lankan law states that once the President officially informs the Election Commission of his decision, the declaration should be gazetted within seven days (expected to be completed by 30 November). The nominations for president should be called sixteen days after the gazetted date of the elections and completed within the next five days. The Election Commissioner can conduct the election anywhere from four to six weeks after the closure of the nomination period.

Comment

¶3. (SBU) The announcement of the presidential election ends a long period of speculation by political observers and indecision by the Rajapaksa administration. While Rajapaksa most likely was spooked by the emerging candidacy of General Sarath Fonseka, we now expect both the SLFP and the opposition immediately to begin their respective election campaigns -- with the most intense period of campaigning probably occurring after the start of the new year. Embassy contacts have begun to warn that the election campaign could be accompanied by widespread election violence and dirty tricks. Post will be meeting with election monitoring organizations and the Election Commissioner in the next few

days and will report septel on those meetings and the
probable need for American election observers.
FOWLER